The Greatest Treasure

from "Sri Gaura Lila"
The Pastimes and Precepts of the Golden Avatar
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Act One

Scene One - The Madhavan Forest

Narrator: Within the Navadvip forest, an old merchant named Kolavecha Sridhara lived in all simplicity. Kolavecha Sridhara was so poor he lived in a hut that had more holes than thatch on the roof. An old iron pot sat just outside the door of his hut. Kolavecha Sridhara kept the water in this pot for such menial purposes as washing his feet.

He sold plates and cups made of banana leaves in the city marketplace. Navadvip is in Bengal, an area so fertile it is called the "garden of India." Banana trees grow everywhere there, so selling their leaves was not a very lucrative business. Kolavecha Sridhara made only a few cents every day. He was as honest as Yudhisthira Maharaj; he always quoted the correct price for his commodities and never cheated. People who knew him always bought at the prices he quoted. For Kolavecha Sridhara, the only purpose of his business was to use half of the few cents he made each day for the worship of the sacred River Ganges.
(Neighbors make fun of him and throw bananas, etc at him.)

Neighbor: Hey, holy man! Is your God as poor as you are? Look at you, you're like a starving dog! You can barely even cover yourself with your cloth!
(Kolavecha Sridhara chants loudly, undisturbed.)

2nd Neighbor: Be quiet, will ya!? You chant and you chant both day and night; we can't sleep anymore!! (throws food at Kolavecha Sridhara) Here, eat something you poor bum! Stop yelling and crying from your hunger pains!!

Nimai: Kolavecha Sridhara returned home from the market place every afternoon in a state of expectation, waiting for a special customer. This Person also harassed him to no end, yet Kolavecha Sridhara loved Him, inspite of the abuse.
(Nimai Pandit and two friends enter. They jokingly run about Kolavecha Sridhara's hut, stealing bananas and flowers. They laugh as Kolavecha Sridhara, acting as if he is angry, chases them off. Then they quietly sneak back to the and, his friends laughing, Nimai Pandit joked with Kolavecha Sridhara.)

Nimai: (loudly) My dear Kolavecha Sridhara, you chant the Holy Names of Krsna, so why do you suffer from this poverty? Tell me, how is it that you

experience a want of food when you are a worshipper of the Goddess of Fortune and her Lord? Is it any wonder that your neighbors laugh at you?

Kolavecha: (humbly) No no, I am all right; I do not actually starve. The Lord provides me with just enough. He is so kind.

Nimai: I notice your cloth is patched in twelve places. Also, there is nothing but holes in the roof of your hut. Look at your neighbors, Kolavecha Sridhara - they are worshiping Mother Durga and receiving so much opulence and comfort. They wear fine cloth and eat whatever they desire.

Kolavecha: You speak very well, learned Professor, but I also eat whatever I desire. The king lives in his palace of gems, eating and dressing most richly. The birds who inhabit the treetops easily find the type of food that they want. The time of both passes away in the same way - they enjoy the fruits of their karma by the will of Sri Iswara, Who controls all movements in this world. Kolavecha Sridhara eats bananas but he meditates upon the future when he will feast in the eternal Spiritual Abode, in the presence of his beloved Lord, Sri Krsna.

Nimai: So, you are also a great pandit! (laughing) How much are these banana flowers?

Kolavecha: They are ten small conch shells per bunch.

Nimai: What!? So much?! Why are you cheating poor brahmanas?
I will give you no more than half of what you say they cost.
(Nimai starts to walk away with the banana flowers without paying.)

Kolavecha: (running after Nimai, feeling great anxiety) Wait! I'm not cheating; that is the standard price - ask anyone! Pandit, if You steal from me everyday, how will I be able to worship Mother Ganges? Do not take these small flowers in this way!
(He pulls the flowers out of Nimai's hands.)

Nimai: (grabbing them back) No, Kolavecha Sridhara! You claim to be so renounced, but now you steal from a brahmana! You must be mad! I am surprised that you do not know Who I am!

Kolavecha: (stares for a long time in awe of Nimai's beauty) I am simply a dog, my dear sir!

Nimai: I know you are a dog, and a very cunning dog, too! (smiling) Do you know that I am the source of your Goddess Ganga? Therefore, Kolavecha Sridhara, you should simply worship Me, giving everything to Me.

Kolavecha: What!? (shouting, covering his ears) Vishnu! Vishnu! Vishnu! You are so arrogant, NO! Aren't you afraid of offending Mother Ganges!?

Nimai: No, but (returning flowers to the exhausted merchant) you may keep these; I don't want them.

Kolavecha: Why do you harass me so much? Why do you pick on me? You don't harass anyone else like this!

Nimai: I seek you out because you possess the greatest treasure.

Kolavecha: (shaking his head in disbelief) What do You mean? I am so poor ? my house doesn't even have a roof on it!

Nimai: No, this is just a front. You wear this torn cloth and you appear to be very poor, but I know that you have a great treasure in this house. (Nimai starts to enter Kolavecha Sridhara's house.)

Kolavecha: What are You doing!? You cannot ?

Nimai: I know you have a great treasure here. I will leave you alone today, but later I will exploit your treasure and expose you to everyone!

Kolavecha: What are You saying! What do I have? I don't even have proper clothes to wear to greet You or a decent seat to offer You. What wealth do I have?

Nimai: Not only do you have great wealth, but you dine on it, sumptuously, and in secret. One day, I will reveal your secret to the world and everyone will see how you have deceived them!

Kolavecha: (distressed) Please, sir, return home now. Let us not quarrel anymore; it is not proper.

Nimai: Do you think that you can get off so easily? Tell Me at once what you will give me today to persuade me to keep my secret!

Kolavecha: But, Pandit, I live by selling banana leaves! What can I offer You!?

Nimai: For now, give Me this gourd that grows on the vine clinging to your hut. I won't trouble you anymore if you give Me this offering.

Kolavecha: (aside) This Brahmana is certainly very arrogant; yet I cannot refuse Him! He may even hurt me if I do not give Him what He demands.

It is actually my good fortune that He comes here to me - otherwise I would think that I had nothing to offer to the brahmanas. What a brahmana takes,

even by force, I see as my good fortune! He is not really disturbing me - rather, I am longing more and more in my heart to have some suitable offering for Him.

Actually, He is simply fulfilling my heart's desire to sacrifice all that I have to Sri Vishnu, for whatever is offered to a brahmana automatically goes to the Lord. Otherwise, I might use my poverty as an excuse not to offer what I do have.

(to Nimai) Listen, my dear Pandit, You need not pay anything. I shall willingly give You the gourd. So, be pleased not to quarrel with me anymore.

Nimai: (smiling) This is very good. I will not quarrel any more with you as long as you give me good gourds from this vine!

Narrator: Everday, Nimai Pandit ate from the banana leaves that Kolavecha Sridhara gave Him, and the gourds, which Mother Saci cooked in milk and pepper, were the most relishable part of His meal. The Lord loves the offerings of His devotees. He never accepts anything from non-devotees.

Kolavecha Sridhara gladly gave the Brahmana these commodities, hoping the arrogant Professor would be on His way, but Nimai would return and have more fun.

Nimai: So, Kolavecha Sridhara, Who do you think I am? I shall go home as soon as you tell Me this.

Kolavecha: (humbly) You are a brahmana, part and parcel of Sri Vishnu.

Nimai: No, I am just a cowherd boy!

Kolavecha: What!? What are you saying!?
(Both laugh and exit.)

Act Two - The Maha Prakash Festival

Scene One

(Blissful kirtan is performed by Nimai Pandit and devotees during narration.)

Narrator: The devotees endured the atrocities and harassment of many powerful demons. The Nawab Hussein Shah who arrested Srila Haridasa Thakur was an incarnation of Jarasandha and his local magistrate in the district of Nadia, Chand Kazi was the incarnation of Kamsa. His city chieftains, Jagai and Madhai, incarnations of Hiranyakasipu and Hiranyaksa, committed abominable acts simply for their own entertainment. Defeating these demons increased the fame of Nimai Pandit and made His Hari Nama Sankirtan Movement appear more and ore glorious and attractive to all people everywhere.

At the Maha Prakash festival Nimai Pandit beautifully revealed Himself as the Supreme Personality of Godhead to His pure devotees. He showed each devotee that Form of Godhead that the devotee most loved and gave benediction to them.

Nimai: O Advaita Acarya, what benediction would You like Me to bestow upon You?

Advaita: O Lord, when You distribute this mercy, You give it to everyone. You give it to women, sudras, the poor and the unfortunate living entities. Without discrimination, You distribute it, and make all living entities cry in the ecstasy of pure love of God and roll in the dust of the ground.
(Kirtan resumes. After a few minutes, Nimai Pandit stops the kirtan and calls for Sridhar Kolevecha to be brought there.)

Nimai: Go and bring Kolavecha Sridhara immediately! Let him see My transcendental opulence. He is constantly thinking of Me in great separation. I want to see him right away. Go to the outsh=kirts of the town and listen to him chanting My name. When you find Kolavecha Sridhara, bring him to Me.

Scene Two

(Several devotees come upon Kolavecha Sridhara as he chants the Mahamantra.)

Devotee: Kolavecha Sridhara! Come, come quickly. The Lord wants you!

Kolavecha: The Lord wants me?
(Kolavecha Sridhara faints and is carried before Nimai Pandit. A soft kirtan is going on.)

Nimai: Get up, Kolavecha Sridhara! Come to Me!
(Kolavecha Sridhara awakens and appears amazed to se the opulence and beauty of Nimai Pandit.)
Come, Kolavecha Sridhara; for so long You have worshipped Me. Many lifetimes you have spent in My devotional service. Even in this life, I have tasted your offerings countless times when I took different commodities from your hands.
(Kolavecha Sridhara offers obeisances.)
O Kolavecha Sridhara, behold My beauty. Today, I will bestow upon you the eight mystic perfections.
(Kolavecha Sridhara looks up and beholds with wonder that Nimai is Krsna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Nimai stands as Krsna stands and pretends to hold a flute. Kolavecha Sridhara looks about the room and back to Nimai in great ecstasy and for a long time, then faints again.)
Kolavecha Sridhara! (reviving him) I want to hear your prayers!

Kolavecha: Dear Lord, I am illiterate and unintelligent - what powers do I possess to glorify You!?

Nimai: That is all right, even your ordinary talks are more pleasing to Me than the prayers of all the demigods.

Kolavecha: Jaya Sri Krsna Caitanya! All glory to Lord Visvambhara, the Lord of Navadvipa! All glory to the Lord of the entire cosmic manifestation! All glory to the Son of Mother Saci!

You appear in every millenium to uphold religious principles in Your different wonderful forms! Secretly, You have been wandering around Navadvip, managing and maintaining everything. Your real identity has been unknown to everyone because it is impossible for anyone to know You without Your mercy.

O Lord, You told me earlier that Mother Ganges, whom I worship, has emanated from Your lotus feet and yet, due to my sinful heart, I could not understand Your supreme position. Now I see that You are the same Personality of Godhead Who previously blessed Gokula Vrndavan with Your presence and now You have again appeared as the sweet Lord of Navadvip!

Nimai: My dear Kolavecha Sridhara, I desire to give you some benediction today. What do you want!?

Kolavecha: I don't want anything! Simply by seeing You, all my desires are fulfilled.

Nimai: No, Kolavecha Sridhara, you must ask for some benediction.

Kolavecha: No, my Lord, I have already received all that I have ever wanted.

Nimai: No! One benediction! You must! I can give you the eight-fold mystic perfections - immediately, I can give them to you!

Kolavecha: (quietly) No, no - I don't want that.

Nimai: I can give you wealth, opulence. I can make you the king of many maharajas. I can give you faithful followers, a kingdom, opulence beyond your wildest imaginings.

Kolavecha: No, I don't want any of hose things.

Nimai: Well, what do you want?

Kolavecha: (humbly) I just want to make banana-leaf cups and banana-leaf plates for your devotees. I simply, humbly, request that wherever I take my

birth, You continue to come see me every day in that form of the beautiful, arrogant, mischievous, brahmana Pandit of Navadvipa and harass me and steal from me! I am simply desiring this, birth after birth! This is all I want and nothing else.

Nimai: Granted.
(Kirtan increases in volume.)

Act Three

Narrator: After converting Chand Kazi, Nimai Pandit suddenly realized that, after all this chanting and dancing, He was very thirsty. He knew that He was near the hut of Kolavecha Sridhara so He went there. Before Kolavecha Sridhara came out of his hut, Nimai Pandit saw the broken iron pot holding Kolavecha Sridhara's water and He drank all the water from it. Those who are fortunate can drink the water which comes from the Lord's Feet as the Ganges but what is The Supreme personality of Godhead doing? He is drinking the water that washes the feet of His devotees!

Kolavecha: (seeing Nimai Pandit) Aiiee! Now I am finished! Ohhhhh! Now I am destroyed! The Supreme Lord has drunk the water from my wretched iron pot!

Nimai: My dear Kolavecha Sridhara, whenever and wherever you take birth, I will have to come to you every day to enjoy pastimes with you because I am conquered by your love. I am your servant, birth after birth.

Nimai: Nimai Pandit thus revealed the secret wealth in Kolavecha Sridhara's possession - the hidden treasure in which the Lord had taken such delight. That treasure was not anything material, but simply Kolavecha Sridhara's pure, humble love. For the Lord, that exalted love is embodied in the water that washed the feet of His devotee. In this way, He revealed the ultimate treasure in this world - the gift of unconditional devotional service, which flows from the feet of His pure devotees.